

update on the I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study

March 2012

I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study

The I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study is a joint effort between the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in conformance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Clean Water Act, and other federal and state regulations. The overall goal of the study is to identify a linkage from I-395 in Brewer, Maine to Route 9 that can improve the current and future flow of traffic, thereby supporting commerce and improving safety.

Purpose of the I-395/Route 9 Study

- Improve linkage of the regional transportation system
- Improve the safety of Route 1A and Route 46
- Improve the current and future flow of traffic
- Improve the shipment of goods to the Interstate Highway System

Where the Study Stands

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the study has been prepared and was posted on the study website as of March 23, 2012 at www.i395-rt9-study.com. The DEIS describes and documents potential impacts in the study area, the progression of the study and identification of the “Preferred Alternative” that MaineDOT will recommend to the federal agencies.

MaineDOT has identified Alternative 2B2 (see map), a new highway alignment, to be the “Preferred Alternative.” Alternative 2B2 is an extension of Route 9 that will connect with I-395 in Brewer. It was selected because it has the least environmental impact and lowest estimated cost, by far.

The public is invited and encouraged to comment on the DEIS. Comments will be addressed when a Final EIS is published at a later date.

MaineDOT and key agencies involved in the NEPA process have scheduled two open houses to provide members of the public with opportunities to learn about the DEIS and the NEPA process, and to ask questions and share concerns directly with the federal and state officials conducting the study. Following the open houses and in accordance with the NEPA process, there will be a formal public hearing. At the hearing, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will also receive comments on the Section 404 (Clean Water Act) permit application.

Open Houses

~ April 4 ~
3:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Brewer Auditorium

~ May 2 ~
1:00 to 4:30 p.m.
Eddington Town Office

Public Hearing

~ May 2 ~
6:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Eddington Elementary School

History of the Study

Study Origin

In 2000, MaineDOT was directed by the Maine Legislature to undertake the I-395 Route 9 Transportation Study. Given the likelihood that transportation improvements recommended by the study would involve funding with federal dollars, the NEPA process was invoked to ensure that impacts of any proposed federal action would be considered and documented. As the lead state agency and in partnership with FHWA, MaineDOT subsequently began development of a study and associated document referred to as an Environmental Assessment (EA).



Change in Document Level

In 2003, it had been anticipated that MaineDOT would recommend a new highway alignment known as Alignment 3EIK-2 to be the Preferred Alternative to address the transportation needs identified. However, FHWA and other federal and state agencies cooperating on the study subsequently determined then that the potential impacts in the study area were so extensive as to require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)—a much more rigorous evaluation and a much higher level of documentation. The study was elevated to an EIS in 2006. Data collection and analysis continued.

Developments Since 2008

November 2008 - MaineDOT, working with FHWA and other cooperating agencies, and with the Public Advisory Committee, narrowed the number of possible highway alternatives to seven. In **December 2008**, those agencies asked that six “connectors” be added to the consideration, in order to minimize impacts.

May 2009 - The cooperating agencies asked MaineDOT to consider utilizing a larger portion of Route 9 in order to reduce the length of new roadway, to minimize impacts to wetlands and vernal pools, and to minimize habitat fragmentation. MaineDOT subsequently re-examined the system linkages, and also re-examined Route 9, determining that it can accommodate the traffic volumes predicted within a 20-year time frame without additional improvements beyond the existing right-of-way.

December 2010 - The agencies identified four alignments for final consideration:

- The “No-Build” Alternative
- Alternative 2B-2
- Alternative 5A2B-2
- Alternative 5B2B-2

At that time, Alternative 3EIK-2, which had been considered the likely Preferred Alternative in 2003, was removed from consideration, with the consensus of the agencies, because of its much more extensive adverse impacts on environmental resources, as well as its much greater length and cost, than the other alternatives.

October 2011 - After careful consideration of the remaining alternatives, MaineDOT and the cooperating agencies concurred in identifying Alternative 2B-2 as the Preferred Alternative because it best satisfies the study purpose and need, has the fewest adverse impacts on environmental resources, and has the lowest cost estimate of the alternatives.

Additional Information

About the NEPA Process

The National Environmental Policy Act requires public agencies to consider the potential impacts of proposed federal actions (such as a major new highway segment that could be funded with federal dollars) on the natural, social, economic, and cultural environment, and to disclose those considerations in a public process and document. The process to evaluate major federal actions typically begins with what is called an Environmental Assessment (EA). If, as the process progresses, the agencies determine that the proposed action could result in significant impacts to natural and 'built' environment, the analysis may be elevated to the level of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The I-395/Route 9 Transportation Study was elevated to the EIS level in 2006.

The EIS document details the process through which a major transportation project is developed, and includes:

- Consideration of a range of reasonable alternatives
- Analysis of the potential impacts resulting from the alternatives
- Demonstrated compliance with all applicable federal and state environmental laws and executive orders

During the NEPA process, a Public Advisory Committee (PAC), comprised of officials and other representatives of communities and interests in the study area is often convened. The PAC meets periodically to discuss the study and provide participating state and federal agencies with advice and input. As the process progresses, officials from the state and federal agencies work together to evaluate and document the potential impacts of the proposed project.

Agencies Participating in this Study

- Maine Department of Transportation
- Federal Highway Administration
- Maine Department of Environmental Protection
- Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- Maine Department of Marine Resources
- Maine Department of Conservation
- Maine Historic Preservation Commission
- Maine Natural Areas Program
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Send Comments to:

Mark Hasselmann

FHWA Maine Division
Edmund S. Muskie Federal Building
40 Western Avenue, Room 614
Augusta, Maine 04330
Mark.Hasselmann@dot.gov

or

Russell Charette

MaineDOT
16 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0016
Russ.Charette@maine.gov

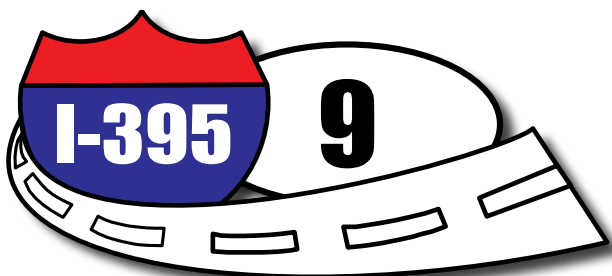


MaineDOT
16 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0016
Return Service Requested

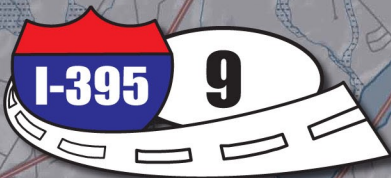
Next Steps

While the formal public hearing will take place on May 2, 2012, the public comment period will continue through May 15. Comments received during the comment period and at the public hearing will be summarized and addressed in the Final EIS. It is anticipated that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will formally announce its determination of the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) after the close of the comment period, and that Alternative 2B2 will be the LEDPA. It is expected that the Final EIS will be published within six to eight months.

Once the Final EIS is completed, MaineDOT will begin to work with the affected communities to protect the Preferred Alternative corridor from development until completion of the environmental process. Before moving forward, MaineDOT will also be required to submit a financial plan for a proposed project to FHWA. FHWA's official approval of the EIS would be in a document called a Record of Decision (ROD). Development (design, property acquisition, and construction) of the eventual project will depend on the decisions of policy-makers and the availability of funding. Additional public process would be conducted during the design phase of the project.

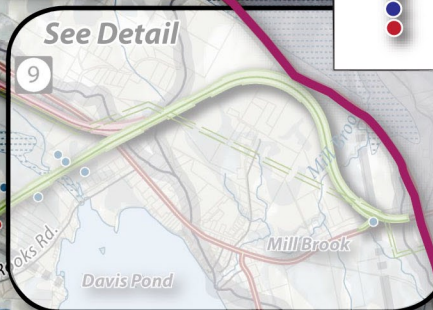


Visit the study website at:
www.i395-rt9-study.com

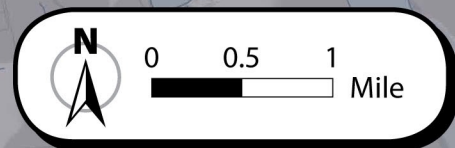


LEGEND

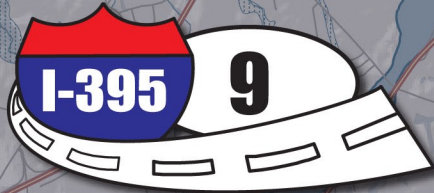
- Study Area
- County Boundary
- Town Boundary
- Parcel Boundary
- Highway
- Roads
- Railroad
- Utility Line
- Streams
- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Ponds
- Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer
- Watershed Boundary
- Public wells
- Vernal Pools
- Significant Vernal Pools



MaineDOT
FHWA Federal Highway Administration
United States Army Corps of Engineers

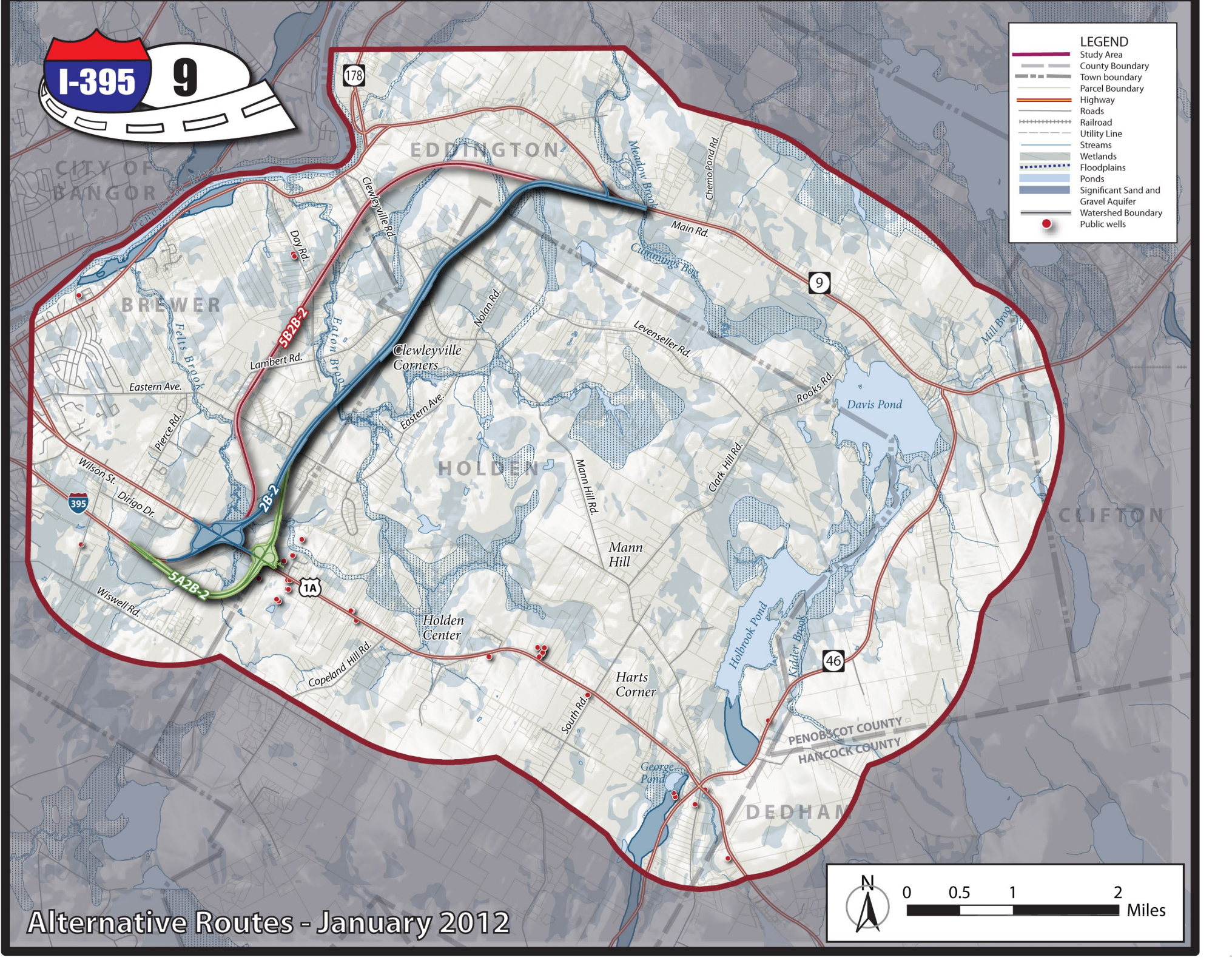


Alternative Routes - February 2010



LEGEND

- Study Area
- County Boundary
- Town boundary
- Parcel Boundary
- Highway
- Roads
- Railroad
- Utility Line
- Streams
- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Ponds
- Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer
- Watershed Boundary
- Public wells



Alternative Routes - January 2012

